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Note1: To meet UNESCO publishing standards, some editing of papers has been required.

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**Speech of Professor Michael Gibbons
Secretary-General of the Association of Commonwealth Universities**

Commission themes

Ministers and Heads of Delegation will want to know that the main themes being addressed by the Commissions at this conference – relevance, quality, management and financing, and international co-operation – are also of profound concern for the rectors and vice-chancellors of the universities of the Commonwealth. For example, each theme played a prominent role in the Association of Commonwealth Universities' General Conference on "Leadership and the Management of Change" held in Ottawa in August of this year. From the outset, it was the intention that this conference would be one of the Association's activities in preparation for the World Conference being held in Paris this week.

Providing information and advice on good practice on the Commission themes, among others, is at the heart of the strategy of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU). We have much to learn from one another and the ACU is grateful for the information and opportunities for networking that UNESCO has provided this week.

In this presentation, I would like to make some remarks on each theme separately.

Relevance

The question of the relevance of higher education in the 21st century touches both the teaching and research functions of universities. On the teaching side, the massification of higher education has brought with it a vast expansion of demand from students in relation to the knowledge and skills they want to acquire while at university. On the research side, the changing nature of knowledge production means that universities are now only one player amongst many in a socially distributed knowledge production system. To maintain relevance in both these spheres – teaching and research – universities, as institutions, need to be more pro-active in relation to their "customers", students, on the one hand, and other knowledge producers on the other. If they wish to re-establish their autonomy in the emerging regime of public accountability, universities need to rebuild relations of trust with the wider community; not only government and industry but with local and regional bodies, with alumni, and with parents, many of whom are unsure of the value of higher education or of the steps that they need to take, as families, to ensure access for their children when they reach the appropriate age to enter higher education.

Quality

The question of how to provide quality in teaching is being discussed in virtually all Commonwealth countries. Most of the debate has been less concerned with the provision of quality than with who shall determine it and within what sort of institutional framework. The key distinction here is between quality assurance and quality assessment. The former concerns the process whereby each university can demonstrate empirically that it has the appropriate systems in place to ensure that high quality teaching is being delivered. Quality assurance is largely about the establishment of appropriate procedures. By contrast, quality assessment refers to the evaluation of those procedures, on a degree by degree and even a course by course basis. Within the Commonwealth, generally, the trend seems to be that while it is agreed that the assurance process should be based outside the university in an independent institution, quality assessment is an academic matter and should be left to the universities themselves. About this division of labour, it must be said, many governments remain unconvinced. One of the most serious challenges facing universities in the next century will be to ensure that what is taught and how it is taught remains within the academic community. The distinction between quality assurance and quality assessment, we believe, provides a model that could be made acceptable to both universities and government, while preserving the autonomy of universities over what are essentially academic matters.

Management and financing

There is no university that is not, one way or another, facing problems in both of these areas. For example, the quality assurance and assessment systems that I have just described require that universities put in place comprehensive management systems that can monitor progress at all stages of curriculum development. There can be no doubt that the ethos of collegiality which is still predominant in universities is, by itself, insufficient to the management needs of contemporary universities. Many universities across the Commonwealth are experimenting with a variety of models. Ministers will, I hope, want to stress in their reports the importance of professionalization in higher education management. Further it is essential that they, individually, take steps to ensure that this takes place. There is no area of society where professionalization is so underdeveloped and the time is long past when this situation should have been changed. In our view, too much management practice in universities is being borrowed from industry where a different culture exists and different objectives pursued. It is not clear that industry-based management practices, on their own, are appropriate to an academic culture. Yet, no progress in developing management practices appropriate to higher education institutions will emerge until an ethos of professionalization permeates the university system and is established there.

All universities in the Commonwealth are facing problems over financing. Most still depend primarily upon government for their funding, but the balance is shifting as universities begin to develop alternate income streams, from industry and charitable foundations to be sure but also, and increasingly, through student fees and alumni associations. Governments need to address the extent to which policies can be developed which are based upon the assumption that a greater part of the burden of higher education should be borne by the participants and their families. This is a "hot" topic currently but a shift in culture is necessary in this arena if universities are to acquire the financial independence they need to pursue innovation. Thought needs to be given, too, to developing good practice amongst universities regarding their interaction with global financial markets. Borrowing in these markets is going to be essential if universities wish to pursue capital developments. In both cases, whether for students or universities as institutions, there will be the challenge of debt management. We would encourage Ministers to flag these issues and encourage UNESCO to develop guidelines of good practice.

International co-operation

It is the nature of contemporary knowledge production that no matter where one is, more than 99 percent of the knowledge needed lies elsewhere, outside the institution. As a consequence, if universities are to continue to play a role in the knowledge economy they need to do so through a variety of alliances and partnerships. This is the principle way that they will be able to maintain access to global knowledge production. Universities, it should not be forgotten, are no longer the only, or even the primary, producers of knowledge. They are one contributor amongst many and they need to develop policies and institutional arrangements that reflect this change in their relative status.

The internationalization of the student population is a new and growing phenomenon. In the past, the purpose of taking foreign students has often been simply to add another income stream to departmental or faculty resources. But, latterly, it is coming to be seen that international students play a vital part in the connectivity that is associated with the globalization of knowledge production. Universities in the Commonwealth now see international students as part of their institutional strategies; as necessary to support the linkages with the global community. We think that this is a very positive development and that it should be encouraged.

Finally, it is the belief of the ACU that if excellence is to be maintained, whether in teaching or research, it must be on the basis of the greater utilization of shared resources. The ACU is working with its members to put in place a range of practical arrangements to this end.